Aleksander Kopka

The Deaths of Socrates

Key words: mourning, deconstruction, Plato, life, myth, auto-immunology, *pharmakon*, writing

> The proper name would have sufficed, for it alone and by itself says death, all deaths in one. It says death even while the bearer of it is still living. While so many codes and rites work to take away this privilege, because it is so terrifying, the proper name alone and by itself forcefully declares the unique disappearance of the unique — I mean the singularity of an unqualifiable death [...] Death inscribes itself right in the name, but so as immediately to disperse itself there, *so as* to insinuate a strange syntax — in the name of only one to answer (as) many.[1]

> and I imagine him unable to turn back on Plato. He is forbidden to. He is in analysis and must sign, silently, since Plato will have kept the floor; signing what? well, a check, if you will, made out to the other, for he must have paid a lot, or his own death sentence. And first of all, by the same token, the "mandate" to bring back that he himself dispatches to himself at the other's command, his son or disciple, the one he has on his back and who will have played the devil's advocate. For Plato finally says it himself, he sent it to him-

[1] J. Derrida: *The Deaths of Roland Barthes*. Trans. P.-A. Brault, M. Naas. In: Idem: *The Work of Mourning*. Chicago and London 2001, p. 34.

> self, this sign of death, he looked for it, he rushed into it without looking back.[2]

How to decrypt *Socrates*? Or perhaps *Plato*? For it is a question of the crypt, and of the death, one among many, of Socrates. The one who died without reluctance, who was sentenced to death by laws of his own state, to whom Plato prescribed a death sentence, whose name was sentenced to bear witness to this great illusion of immortality of the soul. And in the name of what or whom? Platonism, or Plato himself? These grave questions will lead us straight — or by detours and sideways of *Corpus Platonicum* — to the themes of mourning and filiation, to places of the absence of father, and to the absence of Plato in his dialogues or, more precisely, the absence of this *un*faithful student in *Phaedo*, just before the death of his master. Therefore, what I want to focus on here is the process of mourning at work between *Plato* and Socrates, and even between Plato and Plato. The mourning which is under Plato's erasure, and whose erasure is indissolubly related to the detraction of writing and, by the same token, to the question of *pharmakon*.

This great movement of erasure and exclusion has been repeating, with the force of its persuasion, the name *Socrates* in a fixed metaphysical and patriarchal context, trying at once to eliminate its structural proliferation. It incessantly addresses, with persistence and thickness, the image of philosophical filiation unblemished by grief and uninterrupted by death, that nonetheless reveals cracks and gaps, blank spots and traces of the actual mourning, which could never be camouflaged. Not only was this particular problem examined by Jacques Derrida in *Plato's Pharmacy*, but also he returned to it in *Envois*, haunted by the illustration of Socrates and Plato taken from Matthew Paris's *Prognostica Socratis basilei* and reproduced as a postcard. The ambiguity of this image gave Derrida an impulse to re-articulate, this time in more literary or epistolary manner, some of his conclusions on the themes of lineage and writing, which he earlier connected strictly to the notion of *pharmakon*. This visible link between *Plato's Pharmacy* and *Envois* is a good motive to once again look closely at Plato's oeuvre in search of acts of mourning at work: beneath the earth, or perhaps beneath the most oppressing interpretation of Socrates's death.

---

[2] J. D e r r i d a: *The Post Card: From Socrates to Freud and Beyond*. Trans. A. B a s s. Chicago 1987 (6 June 1977). The subsequent references to *The Post Card* will be provided with dates.

*
* *

In *Plato's Pharmacy* Derrida investigates the relation between writing and the living speech. This relation not only determines textual operations within *Phaedrus*, but is also entangled in the Platonic discourse of life and death, mortality of human body and immortality of soul. And this happens after Socrates, the one who never leaves the city even to escape the death sentence (*Crito* 52 b—c), is lured out by the very writing. Aware of its deceptive capabilities, Socrates puts writing under trial, which ends with a verdict addressed in the myth of Theuth. The story begins when an Egyptian demigod named Theuth arrives before the king of Egypt, the king of all gods, Thamus, to present him his latest inventions (and among them writing), which could make life of Egyptians easier. While enumerating subsequent arts, Theuth listens to his king's verdicts and remarks about good and bad features of every single one of the inventions. When it comes to the art of letters, which "will make the Egyptians wiser and will improve their memories; for it is an elixir [φάρμακον] of memory and wisdom,"[3] the king says: "Most ingenious Theuth, one man has the ability to beget arts, but the ability to judge of their usefulness or harmfulness to their users belongs to another; and now you, who are the father of letters, have been led by your affection to ascribe to them a power the opposite of that which they really possess. For this invention will produce forgetfulness in the minds of those who learn to use it, because they will not practice their memory. Their trust in writing, produced by external characters which are no part of themselves, will discourage the use of their own memory within them. You have invented an elixir [φάρμακον] not of memory, but of reminding; and you offer your pupils the appearance of wisdom, not true wisdom, for they will read many things without instruction and will therefore seem to know many things, when they are for the most part ignorant and hard to get along with, since they are not wise, but only appear wise."[4]

According to Derrida, even in this short passage there are tensions within the concept of *pharmakon*, which cannot be captured in a fixed frame: it dislocates the relation between good and evil, domestic and foreign, inside and outside through its textual instability, which begs

[3] P l a t o: *Phaedrus*. Trans. H.N. F o w l e r. In: *Plato I*. London 1914, p. 563 (274 e).

[4] Ibidem, pp. 563—565 (274 e—275 b).

for the king's intervention. This undecidability — neither cure, nor poison — opens up the sphere in which writing can affect the living presence. No matter what the verdict will be, it is possible only by virtue of the dynamic character of *pharmakon*, or writing, if you will. Therefore, Derrida argues that the very logic that tries to govern and assign writing to "its place" springs from instability and play of *pharmakon* itself. He also emphasizes the determining role of the father figure, who evaluates and elevates. But in the case of writing, the father belittles it by pointing out its uselessness and menace. However, if writing is so harmful, if it spoils human memory, if it infects the living presence with non-knowledge, forgetfulness and death, and yet it is so dependable (it has no value of its own), it cannot be simply external. From this point on Derrida demystifies the double movement of Platonism (at once appropriation and exclusion), which breaks the circuit of self-presentation and denotes the interdependency between writing and the living speech. Also, he points out that writing, if only sanctioned by the final, patriarchal instance, is considered by Plato as good writing, which can be useful as long as it reflects the true knowledge and is always verifiable and authenticable. In other words, a signifier, to be valid, requires the presence of its signified. At the same time Derrida refers to the text of *Theaetetus*, where Plato compares the autarkic movement of auto-stimulation of psychic life to writing inscribed in the wax of the soul. "A modification well within the Platonic diagram: writing of the soul and of the body, writing of the interior and of the exterior, writing of conscience and of the passions, as there is a voice of the soul and a voice of the body."[5]

As we can see, the borderline is transformed by none other than Plato. Eventually, he cannot manage without metaphorical and conceptual quality of writing, which also enables any possibility of figurative speech. Yet again, if true knowledge can be left imprinted, the presence would no longer have to keep itself alert, keep its post as close as possible to the truth. And that is the only possibility for Plato to pick up what is presumably left after Socrates — his signs, which were destined to "represent him even if he forgets them; [...] [to] transmit his word even if he is not there to animate them. Even if he is dead, and only a *pharmakon* can be the wielder of such power, over death but also in cahoots with it. The *pharmakon* and writing are thus always involved in question of life and death."[6]

[5] J. Derrida: *Of Grammatology*. Trans. G. Spivak. Baltimore and London 1997, pp. 17—18.

[6] J. Derrida: *Plato's Pharmacy*. Trans. B. Johnson. In: J. Derrida: *Dissemination*. London 1981, pp. 104—105.

This inaugural gesture gives rise to historical repetition of the scheme — and the scam — which tries to cover the interruption of life: a lack within the self. "Declaration of principle, pious wish and historical violence of a speech dreaming its full self-presence, living itself as its own resumption; self-proclaimed language, auto-production of a speech declared alive, capable, Socrates said, of helping itself, a logos which believes itself to be its own father, being lifted thus above written discourse, *infans* (speechless) and infirm at not being able to respond when one questions it and which, since its "parent['s help] is [always] needed" (*toū patrōs áeī deītai boīthoū* — *Phaedrus*, 275d) must therefore be born out of a primary gap and a primary *expatriation*, condemning it to wandering and blindness, to mourning. Self-proclaimed language but actually speech, deluded into believing itself completely alive, and violent, for it is not "capable of protect[ing] or defend[ing] [itself]" (*dunatōs mēn amūnai éauto*) except through expelling the other, and especially *its own* other, throwing it *outside* and *below*, under the name of writing."[7]

Thereby, the declaration of historical violence is made and the one who declares it is Plato, in the name of Socrates, the other of the (perfect) pair who tried to survive through his own words: carriers of true knowledge. The paradox continues: what stands for the principle of Socratic desire to save the living presence, mourns him with every sign of *Corpus Platonicum*, reflecting this absent voice.

*
* *

> Now, this scene of inheritance, repeated in another way in *Plato's Pharmacy* (right after chapter 7 of the PP. "The Inheritance of the Pharmakon: The Family Scene"), *interests* Plato and Socrates in the very position in which you see them posted on this card. The presumptive heir, Plato, of whom it is said that he writes, has never written, he receives the inheritance but as the legitimate addressee he has dictated it, has had it written and has sent it to himself.[8]
>
> Plato's dream: to make Socrates write, and to make him write what he wants, his last command, *his will. To make* him write what he wants by letting (*lassen*) him write what he wants. Thereby becoming Socrates and his father, therefore his own grandfather (PP), *and killing him*. He teaches him to write. *Socrates ist Thot* (demonstration of the PP).

[7] J. D e r r i d a: *Of Grammatology...*, p. 39.
[8] *The Post Card...* (3 September 1977).

> He teaches him to live. This is their contract. Socrates signs a contract or diplomatic document, the archive of diabolical duplicity. But equally constitutes Plato, who has already composed it, as secretary or minister, he the magister.[9]
>
> I have not yet recovered from this revelatory catastrophe: Plato behind Socrates. Behind he has always been, as it is thought, but not like that. Me, I always knew it, and they did too, those two I mean. What a couple. *Socrates* turns his *back* to Plato, who has made him write whatever he wanted while pretending to receive it from him.[10]

What if there is no father and *logos* is orphaned? For the lack that is at stake is also the lack of the final instance. Living *logos* needs a living father, otherwise it would be nothing more than writing, which proclaims its emancipation through what Derrida calls "patricidal subversion." But this subversion denotes inverting powers within the relation between father and son or Plato and Socrates; an inversion set in motion by deconstruction.

According to Geoffrey Bennington, "deconstruction gets going by attempting to present as primary what metaphysics says is secondary"[11] and however dubious this statement is, because of the fact that deconstruction is not interested in simple overthrowing of metaphysical order and replacing it with its opposite, the deconstructive strategy casts doubt on stability of metaphysical positions. In other words, deconstruction exposes metaphysical order to the possibility of inversion, at once claiming "primordiality" of that possibility and undermining the conviction of fixed origin or hierarchy. Jonathan Culler seeks the same deconstructive tendency in Nietzschean *chronologische Umdrehung*, which problematizes the relation of causality. For Culler, Nietzsche's reversal proposes a new understanding of the concept of causal structure as a result of "a precise tropological or rhetorical operation."[12] What interests us in this particular example of the "Nietzschean deconstructive operation" is not the empirical tendency to switch poles between cause and effect, but rather showing the interdependency of these positions and transposing them from the chronological field to the genealogical one. It is not our purpose to argue over temporal anteriority of the effect (i.e. an heir) in

[9] Ibidem.

[10] Ibidem (5 June 1977).

[11] G. Bennington, J. Derrida: *Jacques Derrida*. Trans. G. Bennington. Chicago and London 1993, p. 42.

[12] J. Culler: *On Deconstruction: Theory and Criticism after Structuralism*. New York 1983, p. 86.

relation to the cause (i.e. an ancestor) in principle, but to point out the paradoxical character of genealogical *precedence*. For what *precedes* already presupposes giving up its place. There is no *precedence* without the possibility of being replaced, displaced, being deprived of place. The French equivalent of "to precede," that is *précéder*, heralds this possibility through the word *céder*, which also means "to give up one's place," "to give way." But what comes *after* can only take place if it lacks the place by being *preceded*. *Before* is, therefore, structurally determined by *after* and the other way round. Moreover, what comes *after* already *precedes* what comes *before* since not only it is *after* that which it *precedes* but also *ahead* of it.

"Precedence is always and only that which comes first, comes before what follows, in time and according to a rule: it gives causality necessity and objective validity. *Pre-cedence*, on the other hand, indicates someone or something that could be either *before* (first) or *ahead* (first), that might be at once *behind* (first) or out in *front* (first); something or someone that comes first, goes first, and in *taking* its place has *already* given up its place, given up *the place*."[13] In the light of these words one can reflect upon fragments of Derrida's post cards cited above. There, Plato appears in the double role of someone who is *behind* and *after*, someone who is trying to take Socrates's place, but by doing that he *precedes* him. He points at Socrates, his ancestor, the one who occupies the place of the father,[14] and yet he gives (up to) Socrates this very place of the father, which is already destined to be abandoned. It is as if the absence of the father was temporarily suspended, but only by virtue of the very absence and as if the father (who is also the son) had an ultimate debt to pay (not only and not primarily to Plato) by giving up his place.[15] There-

[13] S. G a s t o n: *The Impossible Mourning of Jacques Derrida*. London 2006, p. 13.

[14] Socrates is portrayed as such both during and right after his trial, for example by Crito — "And moreover, I think you are abandoning your children, too, for when you might bring them up and educate them, you are going to desert them and go away, and, so far as you are concerned, their fortunes in life will be whatever they happen to meet with, and they will probably meet with such treatment as generally comes to orphans in their destitution. No. Either one ought not to beget children, or one ought to stay by them and bring them up and educate them" (P l a t o: *Crito*. Trans. H.N. F o w l e r. In: *Plato I*..., p. 159). — and even by himself in his defense speech — "I am always busy in your interest, coming to each one of you like a father or an elder brother and urging you to care for virtue" (P l a t o: *The Apology*. Trans. H.N. F o w l e r. In: *Plato I*..., p. 113).

[15] This calls into question both the paternal relation throughout Plato's work and the paternal metaphoricity used by Plato to describe the difference between the living speech or *logos* (the good, legitimate son) and writing (a child orphaned by the

fore, Socrates cannot be treated as the true father but barely as a sort of a surrogate father, a deputy who takes the father's place, a spokesman for the paternal voice of God: "Socrates is the supplementary relation between father and son. And when we say that Plato writes *from out of* the father's death, we are thinking not only of some event entitled 'the death of Socrates' which, it is said, Plato did not attend [...]; but primarily of the sterility of the Socratic seed left to its own devices."[16]

Derrida ties the possibility of taking the fathers place to the withdrawal of the face of the true father (who is also portrayed as the sun).[17] According to Derrida, "the disappearance of that face is the movement of differance"[18] and this disappearance is already included in the chain of repetitions and supplementarity, which threatens the integrity of the household and the rectitude of lineage. From now on every repetition consists of the pre-conditional lack within the unity (the dis-unity of repetition), which begs for its supplement. The relief which is brought by supplementarity marks at once the abdication (the mortality) of the replaced element and "the unreserved spend-

---

father). Derrida argues that for Plato it is always a question of distance between the father and the son, whether it is closeness or estrangement: "There is thus for Plato no such thing as a written thing. There is only a logos more or less alive, more or less distant from itself. Writing is not an independent order of signification; it is weakened speech, something not completely dead: a living-dead, a reprieved corpse, a deferred life, a semblance of breath. The phantom, the phantasm, the simulacrum [...] of living discourse is not inanimate; it is not insignificant; it only signifies little and always the same thing. This signifier of little, this discourse that doesn't amount to much is like all ghosts: errant. [...] Writing can thus be attacked, bombarded with unjust reproaches [...] that only the father could dissipate — thus assisting his son — if the son had not, precisely, killed him" (J. D e r r i d a: *Plato's Pharmacy*..., pp. 143—146). The borderline between speech and writing gets blurred again as we repeat the same diagnosis, but this time, instead of describing the living speech as writing imprinted in the soul — and thus as close as possible to the truth — we portray writing as *logos* distanced or even abandoned by its father, a guarantor of the truth. What Derrida tries to show by pointing out this metaphorical exchange "within Plato" is that in the end the division is made not between presence and absence (trace), but between two kinds of trace: "Writing and speech have thus become two different species, or values of the trace. One, writing, is a lost trace, a nonviable seed, everything in sperm that overflows wastefully, a force wandering outside the domain of life, incapable of engendering anything, of picking itself up, of regenerating itself. On the opposite side, living speech makes its capital bear fruit and does not divert its seminal potency toward indulgence in pleasures without paternity" (ibidem, p. 152).

[16] Ibidem, pp. 153—154.

[17] Cf. ibidem, pp. 83—84.

[18] Ibidem, p. 167.

ing"[19] of life reaching beyond its intimacy. Hence, just as the seeds of life cannot defend against their dissemination and they cannot be distinguished from the spilled without any supervision seeds of death, *logos* is inscribed in the movement of writing and the self-effacing trace. Once unleashed (once the seed is spilled), the play between the remedy and the poison (the good and the harmful) cannot be regulated and locked down in tight walls of the pharmacy: "This philosophical, dialectical mastery of the *pharmaka* that should be handed down from legitimate father to well-born son is constantly put in question by a family scene that constitutes and undermines at once the passage between the pharmacy and the house. "Platonism" is both the general *rehearsal* of this family scene and the most powerful effort to master it, to prevent anyone's ever hearing of it, to conceal it by drawing the curtains over the dawning of the West."[20]

This primordial lack within the self, which goes hand in hand with the absence of the true father, is the very precondition of possibility of taking the father's place, of speaking in his name but only temporarily and in a perverted way. And since the disappearance of the father determines the appearance of any kind of spoken word, *logos* is always inherently damaged, perverted and frail. It is as much alive as phantasmal. It is alive because, paradoxically, it is constituted by death, by the lack of presence: it is ran by death and it transports death. Once again, we return to this subversive logic of the *dis*appearance of the father and when we identify him with the truth (or present him as a guarantor of the truth), the conclusions unveil themselves as follows:[21] "The disappearance of truth as pres-

[19] Ibidem, p. 169.

[20] Ibidem, p. 167.

[21] Symptoms of this genealogical transition between Plato and Socrates resonate in other registers of Plato's dialogues, especially when it comes to the relation between Socrates and laws or laws and writing. For example, in *Crito* Socrates is presented as an offspring or a slave of the laws of his city. The laws argue that since they are responsible for Socrates's education, upbringing and protection, they should be treated as his master or father; moreover, they incline that there is no equality between the father or the master and a descendant or a slave. For Plato, the father figure is something that is strictly connected with the authority of the law (either codified or "unwritten"), but it also transgresses the law in the name of the sovereign's (i.e. the father's) authority. In *Euthyphro*, Socrates, who was just heading for his trial, exhorts a young man that it is unholy to prosecute his own father for murder of a stranger even if it is against city laws. Furthermore, in *The Republic*, Plato states that someone who is guilty of killing his own father should be subjected to "repeated deaths" (*The Republic*, book IX, 869 b). We can observe the paternal exchange when Socrates during his trial speaks to Athenians, as if they were his children, that in killing him they will do more damage to themselves and to the city

ence, the withdrawal of the present origin of presence, is the condition of all (manifestation of) truth. Nontruth is the truth. Nonpresence is presence. Differance, the disappearance of any originary presence, is *at once* the condition of possibility *and* the condition of impossibility of truth. At once. "At once" means that the being-present (*on*) in its truth, in the presence of its identity and in the identity of its presence, *is doubled* as soon as it appears, as soon as it presents itself. *It appears*, *in its essence*, *as* the possibility of its own most proper non-truth, of its pseudo-truth reflected in the icon, the phantasm, or the simulacrum. What is is not what it is, identical and identical to itself, unique, unless it *adds to itself* the possibility of being *repeated* as such. And its identity is hollowed out by that addition, withdraws itself in the supplement that presents it."[22]

*
* *

It is the name which comes back ("names are revenants")...[23]

Let us stop for a while by the name of Socrates. The name that not only resisted storms of history and frailness of our — the Western civilization's — memory and archives, but also was engaged as the name in the powerful mechanism of Platonic philosophy, which set the course of thought for centuries. This name marked the double gesture of Plato, who borrowed and used it and yet again tried to tie it to its bearer. Although Plato was aware of the disseminating possibilities of writing, he did not anticipate the deathly effect of the proper name as the peculiar carrier of Socrates's specter. One cannot forget that for Plato, a name, just like an image, is merely a representation of the real thing. But what is at stake is not the character of the name but the possibility to represent the subject during its ab-

---

for he is appointed by God (i.e. the father) to instruct and inform them (*The Apology*, 30 c—31 a). But right after the trial (*Crito*, 50 d—52 d), he gives an account of his conversation with the Laws, throughout which they instruct him that even if the state wronged him, he who was always pleased with living in the city does not have any right to repay and destroy the Laws and his country (which are his parents). Once again, this time from the point of view of the city of Athens, Socrates's death presents itself both as a cure and a poison: the father's substitute (the witness, the representative, the signifier) has to be killed so as to save the father (the truth, the presence, the meaning).

[22] J. D e r r i d a: *Plato's Pharmacy*..., p. 168.

[23] *The Post Card*... (9 September 1977).

sence. The living presence of the subject could not be exposed to death in a way other than through the division in itself. Therefore, the property of the subject and its name is enabled by the movement of expropriation of the self, and what triggers this interplay between the emancipation and the property of a name is always an absence inscribed in the very heart of the presence as the condition of its experience and proliferation of the name. To be more precise: the name can represent the subject during its absence only if this absence determines structurally the character of the subject.

When the name of Socrates is brought out, we cannot simply ignore the spectral effect that is at work throughout Plato's oeuvre. In speaking in the name of somebody, at a single stroke one always marks a singular death of the name bearer and the general condition of the interruption of life by death. Therefore, this peculiar kind of necromancy through naming already reveals itself as an act of mourning. In *The Animal That Therefore I Am* Derrida announces the announcement of death through name: "[...] it seems to me that every case of naming involves announcing a death to come in the surviving of a ghost, the longevity of a name that survives whoever carries that name. Whoever receives a name feels mortal or dying, precisely because the name seeks to save him, to call him and thus assure his survival. Being called, hearing oneself being named, receiving a name for the first time involves something like the knowledge of being mortal and even the feeling that one is dying. To have already died of being promised to death: dying."[24]

By surviving death in carrying the ghost of Socrates, his name is entangled in the double logic of at once underscoring and distorting his singularity. One cannot ever bear witness by speaking in the name of, which in some extreme cases can be a result of a perverse urge of life's self-manifestation, and thus we need to treat Plato's words with suspicion. More than that: we need to be aware of susceptibility of the specter. For the act of mourning is never safe from the narcissistic introjection and idealization of the dead, making his ghost a *ghostage* of the survivor's discourse.

*

* *

[24] J. Derrida: *The Animal That Therefore I Am*. Trans. D. Willis. New York 2008, p. 20.

> [...] it is not Socrates but his demon who is having a *tranche*[25] with young Plato.[26]

In *The Apology* — the most Socratic of Plato's texts — Socrates speaks of "a sort of voice [φωνή]"[27] that haunts him whenever he is about to make the wrong decision: the voice holds him back, but never urges forward. He mentions it once again in his final speech, right after the announcement of the death sentence, to justify the reason of voluntary submission to the penalty: "For hitherto the customary prophetic monitor [ή τοῦ δαμονίου] always spoke to me very frequently and opposed me even in very small matters, if I was going to do anything I should not; but now, as you yourselves see, this thing which might be thought, and is generally considered, the greatest of evils has come upon me; but the divine sign did not oppose me [...]."[28]

Even if we take the metaphorical effect of this δαιμόνιον into account, we must agree on the fact that this divine voice, Socrates's inner other, is meant to divide the subject. The self-consciousness takes a detour through this godlike medium to warn him off. By putting the pressure on the divine otherness of the voice, which can be associated with the voice of the (pure) soul, the picture becomes more and more distorted. And when we take into account that it is the very voice of Socrates's soul that Plato is interested in, and that this particular voice must be detached from its owner in order to speak in his name and in the name of immortality, the spectral effect gains momentum just when Socrates's life is at stake. Also, if we consider the pharmaceutical function of the protective spirit, who remains silent in order to confirm the therapeutic (from the soul's perspective) qualities of *pharmakon*, we can observe the double strategy of self-preservation and self-destruction, which Jacques Derrida attributes to life in general: "[An autoimmune reaction] enables an exposure to the other, to *what* and to *who* comes — which means that it must remain incalculable. Without autoimmunity, with absolute immunity, nothing would ever happen or arrive; we would no longer

---

[25] In French *une tranche* means "a slice," or "an edge." Also, *une tranche horaire* is "a time slot" and *une tranche de temps* is "a time period" while, used in psychoanalytic context, *une tranche* denotes a unit of time spent at the analyst. Moreover, *trancher* means "to slice," "to cut (off)" or "to sever" so splitting and dividing also come into play.

[26] *The Post Card*... (December 1977, between the 9th and the 22nd).

[27] P l a t o: *The Apology*..., p. 115 (31 d).

[28] Ibidem.

wait, await, or expect, no longer expect one another, or expect any event."[29]

Paradoxically, this protective voice arrives through its lack. But the very possibility of the voice to come is inscribed in the autoimmunitary necessity, which at once allows Socrates to await his death and his salvation. Nonetheless, the lack within the subject gives way to Socrates's desire.

But let us return to ghosts, lest we have left them alone for too long. Even if we consider that Plato never uses the actual word δαίμων to describe this protective voice, the chain of references and significations is already at work.[30] Since the word δαίμων also means "divine power," "guardian spirit," "fate," "destiny" and "departed soul," "specter" or "ghost," the border cannot easily separate δαιμόνιον from δαίμων: we must include the exchanges of meaning between the two concepts.[31] Moreover, in *The Republic*, Plato in a single breath recalls δαιμόνιον and δαίμων when he speaks of the most courageous warriors who died on the battlefield and who, in Plato's opinion, are representatives of Hesiod's golden race — the first humans created by gods, who lived in the age of welfare and abundance. After death, their spirits remained among mortals and roamed the earth. "And shall we not believe Hesiod who tells us that when anyone of this race dies, so it is that they become "Hallowed spirits [δαιμόνες] dwelling on earth, averters of evil, Guardians watchful and good of articulate-speaking mortals?"' 'We certainly shall believe him.' 'We will inquire of Apollo, then, how and with what distinction we are to bury men of more than human, of divine, qualities [τοὺς δαιμονιους τε καὶ θεἰους], and deal with them accord-

[29] J. Derrida: *Rogues*. Trans. P.-A. Brault, M. Naas. Stanford 2005, p. 152.

[30] Derrida argues the same when the term *pharmakos* — never used by Plato — is being introduced in the chain of pharmaceutical references: "Plato does not make a show of the chain of significations we are trying progressively to dig up. If there were any sense in asking such a question, which we don't believe, it would be impossible to say to what extent he manipulates it voluntarily or consciously, and at what point he is subject to constraints weighing upon his discourse from 'language.' The word 'language,' through all that binds it to everything we are putting in question here, is not of any pertinent assistance, and to follow the constraints of a language would not exclude the possibility that Plato is playing with them, even if his game is neither representative nor voluntary. It is in the back room, in the shadows of the pharmacy, prior to the oppositions between conscious and unconscious, freedom and constraint, voluntary and involuntary, speech and language, that these textual 'operations' occur" (J. Derrida: *Plato's Pharmacy*..., p. 129).

[31] We can go further: δαίομαι, in which the δαίμων is rooted, means "to be divided."

ing to his response.' 'How can we do otherwise?' 'And ever after we will bestow on their graves the tendance and worship paid to spirits divine [δαιμόνων]'."[32]

The transition between concepts is almost unnoticeable. The demonic and the divine along with the spiritual and the spectral make it impossible to establish a fixed and coherent character of δαιμόνιον, even as ethical guidelines imprinted in the soul.

In *Phaedo*, in turn, Plato speaks of souls tainted with corporeal desires and pleasures. Unlike souls interested in their true immortal and in(di)visible nature, which cherish wisdom and participate in divinity, souls fascinated with the visible, the earthly and the fleeting are condemned to be dragged back to earth because of their corporeal burden: "And such a soul is weighed down by this and is dragged back into the visible world, through fear of the invisible and of the other world, and so, as they say, it flits about the monuments and the tombs, where shadowy shapes of souls have been seen, figures of those souls which were not set free in purity but retain something of the visible; and this is why they are seen."[33]

Carnal contamination makes impossible for a soul to leave earth, and therefore such a soul adopts its ghostly apparition. Here the spectral effect is the result of unresolved relation of a soul to the body as a sustainer of earthly life: it is the very body that splits the perfect unity of the soul.

As we can see, through this set of comparisons and mythological surplus, the differentiation within the concept of protective spirit takes place, even beyond the jurisdiction of Plato, as the appearance of the revenant, which divides Plato's body of work regardless of the soul's quality. Thereby, the mournful character of Plato's thought is once again faintly unveiled. The impact of the dead, the ever present possibility of haunting, blurs the metaphysical frames of the indivisible living presence.

*
* *

> Everything comes back to the child. Look at the discourse they address each other on the immortality of the soul. In truth they had nothing to say on immortality.[34]

[32] P l a t o: *The Republic I*. Trans. P. S h o r e y. London 1937, pp. 490—493 (468 e—469 a)

[33] P l a t o: *Phaedo*..., pp. 283—285 (81 d).

[34] *The Post Card*... (7 October 1977).

"What are you afraid of? Just let me tell you a story" — that is how Socrates casts away the fear of death. All of that because speech has a power to charm the listener the way that he does not feel any anxiety, and this quality is underscored by Gorgias in his *Encomium of Helen*: "Speech is a powerful lord, which by means of the finest and most invisible body effects the divinest works: it can stop fear and banish grief and create joy and nurture pity. [...] The effect of speech upon the condition of the soul is comparable to the power of drugs over the nature of bodies. For just as different drugs dispel different secretions from the body, and some bring an end to disease and others to life..."[35]

It is not a coincidence that he uses the term "drug (*pharmakon*)" to describe the potential influence of speech on human's soul, even in the matter of life and death. In the extreme cases, speech can lead to certain death by putting the spell on the soul and seducing the listener's mind. These words of Gorgias also attract Derrida's attention as he refers to them in *Plato's Pharmacy*. They are a prelude to several pages of an argument on the magical skills of Socrates, who, through his *logos*, can force anyone to finally prove his point. In *Meno*, Socrates is compared to a sting ray, which paralyzes anyone who comes near, leaving the victim's — the interlocutor's — mind and lips numb; to a sorcerer (*pharmakeus*), who exercises magic to convince people of his undisputed knowledge. Socratic logos is therefore the pharmakon, which cannot be fully treated neither as a cure nor as a poison. "The nakedness of the *pharmakon*, the blunt bare voice (*psilos logos*), carries with it a certain mastery in the dialogue, on the condition that Socrates overtly renounce its benefits: knowledge as power, passion, pleasure. On the condition, in a word, that he consent to die. The death of the body, at least: that is the price that must be paid for *alētheia* and the *epistēmē*, which are also powers. The fear of death is what gives all witchcraft, all occult medicine, a hold. The *pharmakeus* is banking on that fear. Hence the Socratic pharmacy, in working to free us from it, corresponds to an operation of *exorcism*, in a form that could be envisaged and conducted from the side and viewpoint of God."[36]

Once again the divinity is set on the stage and the origin of this enchanting voice remains always at stake. But who needs that kind of help? Those whose reason is not developed yet to its ultimate

[35] G o r g i a s: *Encomium of Helen*. Trans. G. K e n n e d y. In: *The Older Sophists*. Indianapolis and Cambridge 2001, p. 52.

[36] J. D e r r i d a: *Plato's Pharmacy*..., p. 120.

stage, who did not participate in true knowledge and therefore are an easy target for earthly concerns: just like children,[37] who are frightened by goblins.[38] To be rightly directed, one has to renounce this fear with the help of an incantation, and this fear is always something immature as if mortality were a childish superstition: "You have the childish fear that when the soul goes out from the body the wind will really blow it away and scatter it, especially if a man happens to die in a high wind and not in a calm weather."[39]

These are the words of Socrates the sorcerer, merely couple of hours before his execution — words to which his student Cebes adds: "Assume that we have that fear, Socrates, and try to convince us; or rather, do not assume that we are afraid, but perhaps there is a child within us, who has such fears. Let us try to persuade him not to fear death as if it were a hobgoblin."[40]

Socrates states that the only way to ward off these fears is to sing charms to the inner child every day. In the eyes of his students, he himself is the best singer to do that, but when it comes to death, he cannot rely only on pure knowledge. The magical incantations of *pharmakeus* transgress the border between reason and myth. *Logos* is not anymore detached and opposed to *mythos*, it uses myth because of its persuasive and soothing qualities, mingling knowledge with fable, just like an alchemist or a sorcerer who prepares his demonic potion. *Ipso facto*, the non-epistemic and affective value of myth can be as efficient as knowledge. Moreover, in the case of life and death it can be even more effective than reason or at least indispensable for someone who is trying to deal with the fear of death. This leaves knowledge insufficient and defective in the gravest matter. Now *mythos* cannot be simply subordinated to *logos* or knowledge.[41] It rather plays the role of a supplement which can, at least in an illusory manner, reach beyond the horizon of death. In *Phaedo*,

[37] There are three distinct references to Athenians as children. First of all, they are Socrates's children, secondly, they are children of laws and their country, finally, they are children in comparison to Egypt (cf. *Timaeus*, 22 b). The latter is based on the usage of writing (*panta gegrammena*) and the resulting difference between old (Egyptian) and immature (Greek).

[38] Cf. P l a t o: *Crito*..., p. 161 (46 c).

[39] P l a t o: *Phaedo*..., p. 271 (77 d).

[40] Ibidem, p. 271 (77 e).

[41] Even though it is very often subsumed by Plato under *logos*. This ambiguity stems from an unfixed context, in which the *logos*/*mythos* relation appears throughout the dialogues (fact/fable, speech/narrative, serious/trivial), and the dissemination of these terms. For example, in *The Republic* (376 e), all *mythoi* (stories, fables) are parts of *logos*, which also means "discourse" in a broad sense. There the value of *my-*

right after the long story of the destiny of the soul which leaves its bodily prison, the value of the myth (along with its justification) as an incantation, is underscored: "Now it would not be fitting for a man of sense to maintain that all this is just as I have described it, but that this or something like it is true concerning our souls and their abodes, since the soul is shown to be immortal, I think he may properly and worthily venture to believe; for the venture is well worth while; and he ought to repeat such things to himself as if they were magic charms, which is the reason why I have been lengthening out the story [μυθον] so long."[42]

The project of immortality is therefore a question of risk, something that even Socrates needs to convince himself of by any means necessary. Fear of death is, in turn, a powerful feeling, which can overwhelm even Plato's *raisonneur*. The difference between him and his students is that he knows the proper use of charms: "Such, then, Charmides, is the nature of this charm. I learnt it on campaign over there, from one of the Thracian physicians of Zalmoxis, who are said even to make one immortal. This Thracian said that the Greeks were right in advising as I told you just now: 'but Zalmoxis,' he said, 'our king, who is a god, says that as you ought not to attempt to cure eyes without head, or head without body, so you should not treat body without soul'; and this was the reason why most maladies evaded the physicians of Greece — that they neglected the whole, on which they ought to spend their pains, for if this were out of order it was impossible for the part to be in order. For all that was good and evil, he said, in the body and in man altogether was sprung from the soul, and flowed along from thence as it did from the head into the eyes. Wherefore that part was to be treated first and foremost, if all was to be well with the head and the rest of the body. And the treatment of the soul, so he said, my wonderful friend, is by means of certain charms, and these charms are words of the right sort: by the use of such words is temperance engendered in our souls, and as soon as it is engendered and present we may easily secure health to the head and to the rest of the body also. Now in teaching me the remedy [φάρμακον] and the charms he remarked, — 'Let nobody persuade you to treat his head with this remedy [φαρμάκῳ], unless he has first submitted his soul for you to treat with the charm. For at present,' he said, 'the cure of mankind is beset with the error of certain

thoi is determined through the role it fulfills in a larger argument by confirming a general statement or reinforcing the speaker's conviction.

[42] Ibidem, p. 391 (114 d).

doctors who attempt to practise the one method without the other [χωρὶς ἑκατέρου].' And he most particularly enjoined on me not to let anyone, however wealthy or noble or handsome, induce me to disobey him. So I, since I have given him my oath, and must obey him, will do as he bids; and if you agree to submit your soul first to the effect of the Thracian charms, according to the stranger's injunctions, I will apply the remedy to your head: otherwise we shall be at a loss what to do with you, my dear Charmides."[43]

What should strike us in this description of beneficent powers of incantation is the comparison between incantation as a way of healing the soul and *pharmakon* as medicine healing the body. The comparison is made, or rather repeated after Gorgias, but also the interdependency between incantation and *pharmakon* in pursuance for general harmony of human being is therefore emphasized ("the cure of mankind is beset with the error of certain doctors who attempt to practise the one method without the other"[44]). Despite the intrusive interpretation, Plato does not subordinate the efficiency of *pharmakon* to the power of logos. It is not the question of "the former without the latter" but "one without the other." This ties indissolubly both *logos* to *pharmakon* and the soul to the body. On the other hand, we can go back to Phaedo and once again examine the connection between the immortal soul and the true knowledge: "[...] when we are dead we are likely to possess the wisdom which we desire and claim to be enamored of, but not while we live. For, if pure knowledge is impossible while the body is with us, one of two thing must follow, either it cannot be acquired at all or only when we are dead; for then the soul will be by itself apart from the body, but not before."[45]

Let us focus here on two things: first of all, despite explicit references to afterlife, Socrates never ceases to mention the alternative scenario in which the soul is as mortal as its bodily cover. Secondly, as long as the soul is connected to its body, *logos* is contaminated and therefore it cannot be a carrier of the true and pure knowledge. Thus the transition between knowledge and myth goes hand in hand with the one between the soul and the body. But the skill of storytelling alone is not enough. It has to be governed by the art of dialectics, in which Plato suggests: "must not he possess some science and

[43] P l a t o: *Charmides*. Trans. W.R.M. L a m b. In: *Plato VIII*. London 1927, pp. 19—23 (156 d—157 c).

[44] Ibidem, p. 23 (157 c).

[45] P l a t o: *Phaedo*..., p. 231 (66 e—67 a).

proceed by the processes of reason who is to show correctly which of the classes harmonize with which, and which reject one another, to show whether there are some elements extending through all and holding them together so that they can mingle, and again, when they separate, whether there are other universal causes of separation. [...] This is the knowledge and ability to distinguish by classes how individual things can or cannot be associated with one another."[46] But dialectics, as the pursuance of true knowledge,[47] cannot be successful since the borders between poles of any dichotomic relation (*mythos/logos*, body/soul) are distorted and Plato clearly cannot separate one side of the relation from the other. It gets even more complicated when we realize that the division and the difference is at work within every constituent of such a relation. Meanwhile, Derrida points out that for Plato dialectics acts as antidote — a defensive counter-poison,[48] either human or divine, which in fact is "the passage" between these two kinds. Thus, it is capable of fulfilling a function of the protective voice of divine descent mentioned in *The Apology*. It also brings us to the conclusion that in exorcising the fear of death two types of repetition take place and are woven together: on the one hand, charms; on the other, dialectics as the repetition of *eidos*. "Anamnesic dialectics [...] cannot be distinguished from self-knowledge and self-mastery. Those are the best forms of exorcism that can be applied against the terrors of the child faced with death and the quackery of the bogeyman. Philosophy consists of offering reassurance to children. That is, if one prefers, of taking them out of childhood, of forgetting about the child, or, inversely, but by the same token, of speaking first and foremost *for* that little boy within us, of teaching him to speak — to dialogue — by displacing his fear or his desire."[49]

This repetitive ability is what will be truly missed in the city of Athens after Socrates's death ("Where then, Socrates [...] shall we find a good singer of such charms, since you are leaving us?"[50]). Hitherto, he — a son of a midwife — is the one who fulfills for Athenians the role of a midwife in the transition between life and death ("And furthermore, the midwives, by means of drugs and incantations, are able to arouse the pangs of labour and, if they wish, to

[46] Plato: *Sophist*. Trans. H.N. Fowler. In: *Plato VII*. London 1921, pp. 401—403 (253 d—e).

[47] Cf. *The Republic*, 511 b.

[48] Cf. *Statesman*, 280 a.

[49] J. Derrida: *Plato's Pharmacy*..., p. 122.

[50] Plato: *Phaedo*..., p. 271 (77 e)

make them milder, and to cause those to bear who have difficulty in bearing; and they cause miscarriages if they think them desirable"[51]), because in case of the immortal soul it is a question both of dying and being born.[52]

Now let us take a step back to myths, and, to be precise, to the status of myth within the opposition *spoudē*/*paidia*. In the text of *Phaedrus* Plato explicitly establishes a relation between a play[53] and the communication of myth. "And what an excellent game (*paidian*) it is, Socrates! How far superior to the other game is the recreation that a man finds in his words, when telling myths (*mythologounta*) about justice and the other topics you speak of."[54]

To these words of Phaedrus Socrates responds that, indeed, it is a noble play but far nobler is the serious discourse guided by the dialectic method. Without the conductivity of reason and dialectics, such a play would scatter seeds of the discourse and thereby it would remain fruitless. If myth does not find its aim outside itself, if it is not directed by a higher purpose (i.e., to modify someone's opinion in the name of the true knowledge or the immortality of the soul, to cast away the fear of death), it is a mere childish amusement without any value: "The opposition *spoudē*/*paidia* will never be one of simple symmetry. *Either* play is *nothing* (and that is its only *chance*); either it can give place to no activity, to no discourse worthy of the name — that is, one charged with truth or at least with meaning — and then it is *alogos* or *atopos*. *Or else* play begins to *be* something and its very presence lays it open to some sort of dialectical confiscation. It takes on meaning and works in the service of seriousness, truth, and ontology."[55]

The paradox of myth is that it can be a serious activity only by virtue of its childish character ("But inasmuch as the souls of the young are unable to endure serious study, we term these 'plays' and

---

[51] P l a t o: *Theaetetus*. Trans. H.N. F o w l e r. In: *Plato VII*. London 1921, p. 33 (149 d).

[52] "It has been shown [...] that every living being is born from the dead. For if the soul exists before birth, and, when it comes into life and is born, cannot be born from anything else than death and a state of death, must it not also exist after dying, since it must be born again?" (P l a t o: *Phaedo*..., pp. 270—271, (77 c—d)).

[53] "In its most direct sense, *paidia* (from *pais*, 'child') means '(a child's) game.' Plato, however, gives this term a much larger meaning by likening to a game anything derived from imitation in the strict sense of the word" (L. B r i s s o n: *Plato the Myth Maker*. Trans. G. N a d d a f. Chicago 1999, p. 76).

[54] This citation was taken from L. B r i s s o n: *Plato the Myth Maker*..., pp. 76—77.

[55] J. D e r r i d a: *Plato's Pharmacy*..., p. 156.

'chants,' and use them as such..."[56]) and when it comes to death, everyone, even Socrates (although Plato would prefer him not to), is a child in need of comforting.

Therefore, myths controlled by dialectics are used to erase the debt owed to death, to annul death. With this step, indispensable and characteristic for Plato, they are woven into the antibody of dialectics and *logos*, which Derrida describes as inverted *pharmakon*: "The dialectical inversion of the *pharmakon* or of the dangerous supplement makes death both acceptable and null. Acceptable because it is annulled. In making us welcome death, the immortality of the soul, which acts like an antibody, dissipates its terrifying fantasy. The inverted *pharmakon*, which scatters all the hobgoblins, is none other than the origin of the *episteme*, the opening to truth as the possibility of repetition and the submission of that "greed for life" (*epithumein zēn*, *Crito*, 53e) to law (the good, the father, the king, the chief, the capital, the sun, all of which are invisible)."[57]

From the way that Plato treats not only the "greed for life," but also grief, we can assume that both affections stem from the same source, that is a greedy, animal part of the soul which, unlike the divine part interested only in true knowledge, is concerned with earthly and transient aspects of life. This approach finds its implementation in the law described in *Crito* and in Plato's design of the state: "The law, I suppose, declares that it is best to keep quiet as far as possible in calamity and not to chafe and repine [...] and nothing in mortal life is worthy of great concern, and our grieving checks the very thing we need to come to our aid as quickly as possible in such case."[58] Otherwise we are "stumbling like children, clapping one's hands to the stricken spot and wasting the time in wailing, ever to accustom the soul to devote itself at once to the curing of the hurt and the raising up of what has fallen, banishing threnody by therapy."[59] Again, one who surrenders oneself to this kind of melancholy condition and does not seek successful recovery from grief, one who acts like a child, does so because one is governed by the "the irrational and idle part"[60] of the soul. Therefore, what Plato prescribes is an exclusion or at least a constriction of mourning, which denotes the ontologico-existential crisis of soul. Plato not only connects it

---

[56] P l a t o: *Laws II*. Trans. R.G. B u r y. London 1926, p. 113 (659 e).
[57] J. D e r r i d a: *Plato's Pharmacy*..., p. 123.
[58] P l a t o: *The Republic II*. Trans. P. S h o r e y. London 1942, p. 455 (604 b—c).
[59] Ibidem, pp. 455—457 (604 c—d).
[60] Ibidem, p. 457 (604 d).

with the turn towards the irrational, but also towards the arts of imitation,[61] which stimulate the irrational part of the soul "by fashioning phantoms far removed from reality."[62]

*
* *

> In compromising Socrates Plato was seeking to kill him, to eliminate him, to neutralize the debt while looking as if he were taking on the entire burden.[63]
>
> [...] the time of this extraordinary moment: Socrates awaiting death.[64]

"We owe ourselves to death [*Nous nous devons à la mort*]" — what a sentence to begin with! And indeed, it kicks off Derrida's book *Demeure*, *Athènes*. However, before Derrida moves there, to the last days of Socrates's life Plato was so obsessed with, he takes a detour, or perhaps he delays things for a while so as to reflect on the debt and the delay. Derrida argues that from the moment of birth we are indebted to death and that we will inevitably have to pay this debt. But this diagnosis would not stand out or be profitable when taken into account without special attention to the question of debt, which cannot be simply separated from the very delay: debt is possible only because it is *post*poned. This combination triggers another notion in Derrida's dictionary: *demeurer* ("to stay," "to remain," "to last," "to persist"), which is engaged into the reciprocal play of the Latin signifiers: "*demorari*: to remain, to stop, to take one's time or to delay — which in turn strangely resembles *demori*: to die, to waste away."[65] In this referential chain, one can discover a more or less visible suggestion that temporalization is temporization and that the indebted life is always already interested in gaining time. Moreover, since life is indebted, it never simply presents itself fully as its own, but as a postponement of such a possibility beyond the horizon of death: "the living present is nevertheless in fact, really, effectively, etc., delayed [*différé*] ad *infinitum*. This differance is the difference between

---

[61] Plato sees the same risk in writing which is presented by him as occult, irrational, illusory and deceptive just like all the techniques of representation or *mimēsis*.

[62] Ibidem, p. 459 (605 b).

[63] *The Post Card*... (1 June 1978).

[64] J. D e r r i d a: *Athens, Still Remains*. Trans. P.-A. B r a u l t, M. N a a s. New York 2010, p. 29.

[65] Ibidem, p. 9.

the ideal and the nonideal."[66] Thus, life in its earthly form cannot be considered homogeneous because, through its deficiency, it insists on the supplementarity of the outside. Already in *Speech and Phenomena*, Derrida reintroduces the living presence as enabled by the very condition of its "openness upon exteriority in general, upon the sphere of what is not 'one's own',"[67] which he calls "spacing." This openness coincides with the movement of temporalization, which for Derrida makes time structurally dependent on space. What is considered temporal is never pure, but primordially contaminated by the spatial, therefore, this external spacing (*espacement*) is (or cannot be distinguished and detached from) the internal delay we are dealing here with: "As soon as we admit spacing both as 'interval' or difference and as openness upon the outside, there can no longer be any absolute inside, for the 'outside' has insinuated itself into the movement by which the inside of the nonspatial, which is called 'time,' appears, is constituted, is 'presented.' Space is 'in' time; it is time's pure leaving-itself; it is the 'outside-itself' as the self-relation of time. The externality of space, externality as space, does not overtake time; rather, it opens as pure 'outside' 'within' the movement of temporalization."[68]

What Derrida calls temporalization is repeated once again in *Margins of Philosophy* as the very *temporization*. By this subtle inversion he points out the necessity of taking a delay into account whenever we want to raise the question of life and its relation to death. Life cannot be construed as anything but a delay, which "must be taken to mean something other than a relation between two 'presents'; and the following model must be avoided: what was to happen (should have happened) in a (prior) present A, occurs only in a present B."[69] The delay, which is "unthinkable within the authority of the logic of identity or even within the concept of time,"[70] emerges from the lack[71] and, along the same lines, from a debt of presence towards (not even its own) other, shattering the metaphysical hopes for the

[66] J. Derrida: *Speech and Phenomena*. Trans. D.B. Allison. Evanston 1973, p. 99.

[67] Ibidem, p. 86.

[68] Ibidem, pp. 85—86.

[69] J. Derrida: *Writing and Difference*. Trans. A. Bass. London and New York 2001, p. 427.

[70] Ibidem.

[71] This lack repeats itself as the lack of protective voice: the interruption meant to affirm Socrates's integrity confirms at the same time his heterogeneity. It is the lack, the blank, the silent interval of writing, which pushes him to self-execution. Socrates dies voiceless: bereaved and bereft.

autarky and auto-preservation of life. This lack in the heart of presence, the guarantor of its *mortgage*, is also called an interval or differance: "An interval must separate the present from what it is not in order for the present to be itself, but this interval that constitutes it as present must, by the same token, divide the present in and of itself, thereby also dividing, along with the present, everything that is thought on the basis of the present, that is, in our metaphysical language, every being, and singularly substance or the subject. In constituting itself, in dividing itself dynamically, this interval is what might be called *spacing*, the becoming-space of time or the becoming-time of space (*temporization*)."[72]

The will to neutralize the debt, which Derrida assigns to Plato in one of his postcards, opens another dimension, which does not prolong the discussion about lineage, but grafts or recovers the question of delay from the Platonic discourse of life and death. For Plato, the eventual erasure of debt (which is his debt owed neither *only* to Socrates, nor *first of all* to Socrates) was crucial to establish the relation between mortality of the body and immortality of the soul. The proof of property of such an erasure lied in Socrates's will to die, grounded in pure knowledge. Unveiling this knowledge is the aim of the true philosopher (in his practice of dying) and this very vocation should determine his actions, especially facing the possibility of his near death. Thus Plato, in the name of absolute self-presence, obliged Socrates to chose between one death (executed with a help of *pharmakon*) and the other (natural) and thereby to limit the delay to the necessary minimum,[73] binding at once the existential perspective to the ontological one. For when Derrida states that metaphysics is interested in the destruction of the delay,[74] we must not only consider the delay from the linear or temporal perspective, the period between nonideality and ideality marked by the threshold of death, but also the delay as the necessity of structural constitution of the living presence.

The only way to save Socrates was to kill him by prescribing to him a voluntary act of self-execution. But what Plato could not avoid in his explanation was to write out of another delay between the verdict and the deferred execution, the delay which is at stake through-

---

[72] J. D e r r i d a: *Margins of Philosophy*. Trans. A. B a s s. Chicago 1982, p. 13.

[73] And is this not in contradiction with Plato's general suspicion of any kind of pharmaceutical use? Since for Plato every remedy is harmful and disturbs the natural way of life because it is artificial, this choice of death prescribed to Socrates only amplifies the paradoxicality of this situation.

[74] J. D e r r i d a: *Athens, Still Remains*..., p. 51.

out *Phaedo* and *Crito*. And this very time, given to Socrates by chance, is simultaneously dedicated to the denial and practice of mourning or, one could say, the practice of mourning as its denial (which certainly is Derrida's diagnosis for Plato's actions). Moreover, once the delay inevitably appears on stage, or when it stages itself, it serves Plato as much to construe the ethical dimension of Socrates's deed, as to underscore the grave importance of self-knowledge as a guarantee of soul's immortality and to neutralize the debt to death and mourning.

Thus, Socrates bears witness to the true knowledge and he does so in awaiting his death, in practicing it: something he prescribed for himself and for the others (*Phaedo*, 67 e, 80 e). But the purifying power of death is reversed just as no execution can defile the city during the festival[75] which coincides with Socrates's trial: "Death, masks, makeup, all are part of the festival that subverts the order of the city, its smooth regulation by the dialectician and the science of being. Plato, as we shall see, is not long in identifying writing with festivity. And play. A certain festival, a certain game."[76] This play gives Socrates more time, postpones the debt for a while. To annul the delay he dreams and he interprets his dreams. After all, sleep is the state in which Crito finds him (let us not forget that Socrates compares death to a long sleep without dreaming): "He waits, but without waiting; he awaits death and dreams of annulling its delay by composing a sacrificial hymn."[77]

It is in dreams[78] that a fair woman clothed in white appears to Socrates and announces the exact moment of his death: the moment of arrival of the ship, which at the same time is a moment of departure of his soul. Therefore, Socratic dreams signify at once the final victory of the rational part over its irrational opposite and a vicious desire for immortality. In *Phaedo*, it is again a recurring dream,

---

[75] Meaning: during the festivities commemorating Theseus's expedition to Crete to slay the Minotaur. According to Plato, the Athenians had made a vow to Apollo before the departure of Theseus that, should he return safely, they would honour the gods by sending a mission every year to Delos. This event gave rise to the annual festival which started a day before Socrates's trial. During this time the Athenians consecrated a boat and organized procession (*theōria*) of maidens to Delos: "Now it is their law that after the mission begins the city must be pure and no one may be publicly executed until the ship has gone to and back; and sometimes, when contrary winds detain it, this takes a long time" (P l a t o: *Phaedo*..., p. 202 (58 b—c)).

[76] J. D e r r i d a: *Plato's Pharmacy*..., p. 142.

[77] J. D e r r i d a: *Athens, Still Remains*..., p. 51.

[78] According to P l a t o, in dreams the rational part of us is no longer on guard and desires come out (*The Republic*, 571 c—d).

which urges Socrates "to make music, because philosophy was the greatest kind of music,"[79] but in the last days he takes this dream literally and becomes a poet, a myth-maker or, more likely, a double of Aesop (a double of the double) in praising Apollo, to whom he owes the stay of execution. Nevertheless, he already knows "by a kind of knowledge, an unconscious knowledge, it is true, to see in advance, to foresee and no longer let himself be taken by surprise by the delay of death"[80] and this knowledge is meant to depreciate the time of the delay, the time that changes nothing, so it can be used even for poetry and myths. In order to save himself, Socrates is ready to testify against his life even after his trial and he does so, as we can imagine, with a heavy heart, renouncing at once all his grief and the right to mourn, but also covering his face for the last few moments before pharmakon performs its duty: to hide what?

*
* *

> Watch closely while Socrates signs his death sentence on the order of his jealous son Plato...[81]
>
> The other one continues to write tranquilly, hypnosis I tell you, he dreams and prepares, prepares himself for the suicide (last wishes, makeup, "banalization," the great parade, he knows that he will not make it and that someone will have to lend him a hand, the dose has to come to him from elsewhere. And from where he will have never known.[82]

To die without any reluctance — that is Plato's wish. The wish Socrates died for — at least in Plato's writings. But what does that wish disclose? The wish, this unbelievable proclivity towards not even death (because death is already annulled and despised), but an afterlife: one life after another. Is there any contention or contradiction which this wish tries to conceal, being at once the mask and the mark of the intrusion of death? For to save Socrates through the great illusion of immortality, Plato has to deny him his mortality, to deprive him of his mortal life. Furthermore, by erasing the significance of death, he gives up on the very life, because affirmation of life is strictly connected with the delay of death. Without the affir-

[79] P l a t o: *Phaedo*..., p. 211 (60 e).
[80] J. D e r r i d a: *Athens, Still Remains*..., p. 33.
[81] *The Post Card*... (6 June 1977).
[82] Ibidem (July—August 1978).

mation of mortal life — and with the annulment of death — there is nothing worth saving from death. And since Plato links the desire for the true knowledge to his visions of departure and rebirth of the soul (all that to reassure us of an afterlife), since he even compares this desire to the melancholy act of mourning (i.e. unhealed longing for the beloved dead, which eventually leads to death), this desire cannot be purified of its constitutive component: an involuntary affirmation of mortality. Therefore, since only mortal life can be saved from death, immortality, which is promised by the true knowledge, cannot be exchanged for mortal life and, by the same token, the true knowledge cannot be a successful remedy for the fear of death or any act of mourning in a broad sense. Immortality marks out the end of both the desire to save life and the life itself.

Thus, actions of Plato are inevitably inscribed in the logic of auto-immunity "by which a living being can spontaneously destroy, in an autonomous fashion, the very thing within it that is supposed to protect it against the other, to immunize it against the aggressive intrusion of the other."[83] To save life from death, he erases death through the project of immortality and thereby deprives life of its constituent: "both self-protecting and self-destroying, at once remedy and poison. The *pharmakon* is another name, an old name, for this autoimmunitary logic."[84]

*
* *

What is left after all, i.e after the death of Socrates? A voice rewritten by his ghostwriter? Or the voice of Plato? And precisely when and where? This voice, at once marking an absence of the living presence and the apparition of the absent.

[83] J. D e r r i d a: *Rogues*..., p. 123.
[84] G. B o r r a d o r i: *Philosophy in a Time of Terror*. Chicago 2004, p. 124.

Aleksander Kopka

Śmierci Sokratesa

Słowa klucze: żałoba, dekonstrukcja, Platon, życie, mit, autoimmunologia, *pharmakon*, pismo

Streszczenie

Niniejszy artykuł jest próbą ukazania w myśli Platona znamion filozofii żałoby jako filozofii zorientowanej na nieustanne odnoszenie się (w swej strukturalnej i ontologicznej heterogeniczności) podmiotu do (własnej) śmierci. W tym celu podążam śladem dekonstukcji Platońskiego tekstu przeprowadzonej przez Jacques'a Derridę przede wszystkim w *La pharmacie de Platon*, a następnie kontynuowanej w *La carte postale*. Dowodzą zarazem, jak sam tekst dialogów zdradza niekoherencję Platońskiej metafizyki, ze szczególnym uwzględnieniem kwestii nieśmiertelności duszy, relacji pisma do żywej mowy i roli mitu w dyskursie o nieśmiertelności. Tak nakreślony projekt myśli Platona jako filozofii zakamuflowanej żałoby powiążę z kluczową z perspektywy Derridy myśli żałobnej problematyką odroczenia, reakcji autoimmunologicznej, zawłaszczenia i idealizacji zmarłego oraz jego powrotu przez swe imię.

Aleksander Kopka

Die Tode von Sokrates

Schlüsselwörter: Trauer, Dekonstruktion, Platon, Leben, Mythos, Autoimmunologie, *Pharmakon*, Schrift

Zusammenfassung

In seinem Artikel versucht der Verfasser, in Platons Philosophie irgendwelche Merkmale der Trauerphilosophie als der auf ständige Stellungnahme des Subjektes (in struktureller und ontologischer Vielfalt) zum (eigenen) Tod gerichtete Philosophie zu finden. Zu diesem Zwecke ergründet er die von Jacques Derrida besonders in *La pharmacie de Platon* durchgeführte und in *La carte postale* fortgesetzte Dekonstruktion des Platonischen Textes. Der Verfasser möchte aufzeigen, dass der Text von Dialogen eine Inkohärenz der Platonischen Metaphysik offen legt, indem er vor allem die Unsterblichkeit der Seele, das Verhältnis der Schrift zur lebenden Sprache und die Rolle des Mythos im Diskurs über Unsterblichkeit berücksichtigt. Den so geschilderten Entwurf von Platonischen Ideen als Philosophie der verhüllten Trauer verknüpft er mit der laut Derridas Auffassung von Trauergedanken grundlegenden Problematik: Vertagung, autoimmunologische Reaktion, Aneignung, Idealisierung des Verstorbenen und dessen Rückkehr dank seinem Namen.